

NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORK

Moderator: Michele Higgs
March 21, 2006
3:00 p.m. EST

Operator: Thank you for standing by and welcome to this Neighborhood Networks monthly conference call. This call is being recorded.

At this time, I would like to turn the call over to Ms. Michele Higgs; please go ahead, ma'am.

Michele Higgs: Thank you, Tulare. Good afternoon everyone and welcome to the Neighborhood Network's March conference call. The topic for today's call is "The IRS Can Be Your Friend: Using IRS Resources at Your Properties and Neighborhood Network Centers." Yes, I've said it. The IRS can be your friend, now stop laughing.

We have a group of speakers today that will put you in touch with the many resources that are available from the Internal Revenue Service, which can be of great help to the centers in our neighborhood. My name is Michele Higgs and I'm one of the Technical Assistance coordinators (TA coordinators) working with you to address the technical assistance needs of the various Neighborhood Networks around the country.

Before I introduce our speakers for this afternoon, I want to remind this community of multifamily Neighborhood Networks centers, that the Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool (START), also known as the START business plan, contains resource materials that help you to survey your

residents' interests and needs, allow you to pinpoint the kinds of programs you offer. The START plan is also key to locating and monitoring the partnerships you form to shape the programs to meet your residents' needs. If you have questions about the START business plan, resident surveys, partnership development, or general questions pertaining to Neighborhood Networks, please call the toll-free Neighborhood Networks information line, at 888-312-2743. You can also visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site, which is www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org. Again, the information line is 888-312-2743 and the Web site is www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org.

I also want to remind listeners that an audio and verbatim transcript of this call will be made available on the Neighborhood Networks Web site, in about two weeks.

I'd like to offer congratulations to the following new Neighborhood Networks centers, Jackson Terrace Neighborhood Networks Center in New York; Susquehanna Townhouse Neighborhood Networks Center in Pennsylvania; Episcopal House Neighborhood Networks Center in Pennsylvania; Hillrise Mutual Housing Neighborhood Networks Center, also in Pennsylvania; Ralston Mercy Douglas Neighborhood Networks Computer Center in Pennsylvania; Kephart Plaza Senior Computer Learning Center in Pennsylvania. It looks like Pennsylvania is a force to be reckoned with. Welcome to the Neighborhood, all of these new centers.

Well, we're staring down the deadline of April 15, does that give anyone the willies? For those of us who have the resources to get taxes done or have someone do them for us, we can gather our papers and get-to-stepping. But for those of us who haven't a clue, or haven't a "soul," the impending deadline could mean there will be some wheel spinning going on. That's why we've gathered a group of presenters for this conference call who can speak about the resources and services the IRS has to offer for centers and residents alike. Abraham Odom, Senior Technical Assistance Coordinator with Neighborhood Networks has gathered Sonya Manners, Executive Director of the Dartmouth Square Neighborhood Networks Center in Inkster, MI; Carol Quiller

who is a tax analyst with the Internal Revenue Service, and Jerryl Bennett, a HUD project manager and Neighborhood Networks Coordinator, to speak with us today about these issues.

This afternoon, we want to help you approach the IRS with understanding and confidence, and less fear and trembling. Neighborhood Networks centers and building and nurturing relationships with IRS, can help make things happen. I'm not going to present a success story today because I suspect there will be a number of questions for our presenters, and I don't want to get in their way.

With that in mind, I'll turn the call over to my colleague, Abraham Odom, who located all of these speakers and coordinated the call for today. And he will introduce speakers, Abraham . . .

Abraham Odom: Thank you, Michele, and welcome everyone to the monthly Neighborhood Networks conference call. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce our speakers today, who will touch on several different topics, topics including tax programs that benefit low-income properties, the importance of educating your residents about tax filing programs, finding tax experts who can educate the residents at your center, how Neighborhood Networks centers benefit from these services, and obtaining tax information about programs and services for your center.

Our first speaker will be Carol Quiller. Carol is a tax analyst with the Internal Revenue Service and comes to us today with over 20 years experience with the IRS tax programs. In her current role, she provides outreach and education to organizations assisting low- and middle-income taxpayers about services and benefits that the IRS offers. She also specializes in research and development of partnerships within educational institutions and government entities to reach low- to middle-income taxpayers.

After Carol, we'll hear from Jerryl Bennett. Jerryl Bennett is a project manager in the multifamily housing, with the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Mr. Bennett is also the HUD

Neighborhood Networks Coordinator for the state of Maryland. Mr. Bennett has experience working with centers that have taken advantage of using these IRS resources, and he will share some of those experiences and benefits to our centers.

Our final speaker will be Sonya Manners. Sonya is the property manager at Dartmouth Square Apartments, and the Executive Director for the Dartmouth Square Neighborhood Network Center located in Inkster, MI. Sonya has worked at Dartmouth almost 11 years, and today, she will tell us about her experience using the IRS resources to benefit her residents.

So, in that order, we will now hear from our speakers, Carol.

Carol Quiller: Hi, everyone. This is Carol Quiller, again, with Internal Revenue Service, and I'm glad to first of all, be invited to this call. We've been doing some outstanding work with Neighborhood Networks and HUD in general, and we appreciate all of the efforts that have been made by those who are existing and partnering with us, and those who are looking forward to doing so in the future.

Just to, basically, kind of give you an overview of some of the programs that IRS can kind of give you some assistance in reaching your residents on your properties, in your properties, or who visit your technical centers. We have three programs, basically. The first one is called the VITA Program, and it's the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program. And VITA has been in existence for about 36 years, so we've been around a long time doing free tax prep. But that's basically what VITA is about. It offers free tax help to people who cannot afford professional assistance. And basically, they help – the VITA volunteers help prepare basic tax returns for taxpayers with special needs, including persons with disabilities, low- to-limited income, non-English speaking persons and some elderly taxpayers. VITA has been located in all areas where the program comes from all walks of life that the volunteers come from, I'm sorry. It's retirees. It's college students. It's high school students, and people who just, in general, want to help out their

community. What we're finding most of people, that we helped one year, may come back to volunteer at a nearby VITA site because they've been so rewarded by the experience, that they want to help someone else.

So VITA is a very good program that we have, and we are – we do have a few centers in our Neighborhood Networks, and I think that's what Sonya is going to talk about later on in the call.

There's also tax counseling for the elderly (TCE). And that is basically like the VITA program, but it caters to individuals who are 60 and older. And it also is a free tax prep program. And basically, our AARP groups are actively involved with those TCE programs.

Also, we have other programs called low-income tax clinics. And these clinics are to provide taxpayers with a place they can go when they have controversies with the Internal Revenue Service. And usually this service is housed at a university or local legal aid clinic. And what happens is, if you're having problems with the IRS, and you need some representation these low-income tax clinics will provide you with some tax education, some outreach. They also provide – will represent you before the Internal Revenue Service, by giving all of the information, or going over the information with you, and helping the taxpayer through those controversies.

There's low-income tax clinics. There's VITA sites. There's TCE sites all over the U.S. I mean there's absolutely one, and I know, in every state. There may be more than one in each state. But we know, at least, there's one. And these services provide a bevy of information that you could access or use, or get your residents to use, in your Neighborhood Network centers.

Basically, when IRS reorganized about five years ago, and we needed to kind of segment who our target populations are that we were reaching. And we figured that—well Congress figured that—we we're not educating the public enough about their tax obligations, and compliance issues. And we needed to do a better job at that. So that's how we came about with these

educational institution partnerships, the financial education partnerships. And also, the government entity partnerships, and volunteering community partnerships. So, that's where it comes in where the IRS is working with the Neighborhood Network centers, just to reach out further to a group of people that we might not have reached, despite our regular measure of work that we do, because reduced in resources, reduced in staffing, we just were not able to reach certain people that were out there in rural areas, in travel communities, in low-income populated areas because of the lack of resources. So, through the leverage bottle where we get together and combine these resources with other government agencies, or financial institutions, or educational institutions, we're able to reach those markets of taxpayers, that we couldn't reach before.

Along with that outreach and education, we try to do the free tax preparation, and also, some financial education, after those things have been done. Once you get these large refunds from the earned income tax credit, we want you to make sure that you do the best that you can with that money. We know there are dire needs in some of our neighborhoods, if immediate assistance is needed from the funds that are received from these refunds. But we tried to educate them on what would be the best approach instead of buying that large screen TV, settle for a smaller screen TV. Instead of buying five pairs of sneakers, buy one pair of sneakers, and put that money somewhere for maybe buying a house, or investing in a business that you have some wishes to obtain. Or help then with the education for your children.

So, IRS is a kinder and gentler organization, at least we're trying to put a new face on it and trying to reach those who, again, have not been reached so far, but we're doing it through operations like Neighborhood Networks and organizations that are out there that have the same idea, as far as reaching the under segmented, or not normally reached populations that we've been trying to reach.

We have a wealth of information, you can find out more about our VITA at TCE programs, low-income tax clinics by reaching our Web site, which is www.irs.gov, or by calling our toll-free numbers at 1-800-829-1040. And also, since it is tax season, and you may have some of your residents ask about tax issues or tax forms, please have them call or visit our Web site at 1-800-829-3676, that's a way to get forms. But there's also – the forms can be downloaded and used that come off our Web site, which is the same as the www.irs.gov.

We would be glad to have people come out and talk to you about getting involved with holding a VITA center at your site. Or even having some – if there's a concern at your site amongst the residents about certain tax issues that they're facing, including some predatory lending issues, or rapid refund loans, or issues of that nature, we'd be glad to have some people come out and talk to you about that. We don't like to call them tax experts, but we do have people that specialize in certain subject matters.

And also, if you have any questions regarding getting involved with VITA, the first stop can always be me. Again, I'm Carol Quiller. I can be reached at 404-338-8091. Or I can be reached at Carol.Quiller@irs.gov. Thanks everyone.

Michele Higgs: Terrific. Thank you so much, Carol. It was a lot of good information. And thanks for giving out your e-mail address so that folks can get in touch with you.

What we'd like to do next, is move on to Jerryl Bennett, who is the HUD [Neighborhood Networks] Coordinator for the state of Virginia, and also a project manager there. And he wears a lot of hats, I know. And I know he has quite an investment in this issue. So Jerryl, are you ready?

Jerryl Bennett: Yes, ma'am, I am. I want to start by saying howdy to everyone. As you can tell, I'm from Texas, a transplant to Virginia. I want to start off by mentioning HUD's programmatic and strategic goals. It's mission is threefold. It's to increase homeownership opportunities by making

the homebuyer process less complicated, and helping HUD assisted renters become homeowners. The second component is to promote decent, affordable housing by helping HUD assisted renters make progress towards self-sufficiency, and expanding the access to affordable rental housing. The third component of our mission is to strengthen communities by helping organizations access the resources they need to make their communities more livable.

Now – and those of you who know housing, know we have quite a few regulatory books, quite thick. But in the 4381.5, the purpose of a Neighborhood Networks center is to provide hope, positive focus to residents about the future, and also by being established, it becomes a factor in cutting crime and vandalism.

Now, I'm to address the importance of educating residents about the tax filing programs. One of the important components of the tax-filing program in our Neighborhood Networks center which its ultimate objective is to call the VITA sites to be co-located in the Neighborhood Networks centers. And when done, you know, both objectives can be achieved, the IRS's and HUD's objectives.

I want to start by saying that it helps residents avoid leaving money on the table, especially when it comes time to reconcile their tax account. Now if you look at *USA Today*, how appropriate is this topic today, we already have press on it. It says that Americans are enjoying their biggest tax refunds ever, and it's costing them billions. Saying that they had overpaid their federal income taxes. And it says about \$10 billion extra is being withheld. And that's due to these tax credit incentives for the most part. It says that the changes in the tax rates automatically revise withholding levels, but changes in tax credits and deductions don't automatically ensure to the taxpayer, which means that a lot of people don't know that there's money sitting at the table for them, which is the reason for this outreach campaign and this collaboration.

The programs – residents can learn by using these programs of the optimal strategies, that are going to put more of this money back into their pocket. The programs help individuals make better financial decisions, as well as preserve the value of that earned income tax credit, whether those credits are earned for childcare expenses, college education, healthcare deductions and energy improvements, just to name a few. Those are important aspects for us here at HUD and very important life skill issues and daily living issues for the residents.

Through the IRS's alphabet soup, the EIC, the CTC, the TCE and the AARP, and Carol just mentioned all of those, residents can understand how those refunds can be applied to an asset development program, which can help them achieve long-term financial goals such as establishment of savings account, purchasing a home, or a special program offered to the aging baby boomers. Now that's in keeping with our mission of increasing the homeownership aspect. Some of the financial literacy programs include credit repair, individual development accounts, where a person can put in \$1 and get a \$3 federal match. Car ownership programs, where there are loans that can be extended to people, any barrier that keeps them from working, low-income residents, we're talking about. And home ownership programs where you get down payment assistance, by virtue of (grants), depending on the jurisdiction, and depending on if you go to some of these credit counseling programs.

Now, how do Neighborhood Networks centers benefit from these services? What happens is that the – when these services are articulated and communicated in the public, it induces more traffic, thereby more usage. And what happens as a result of that, people come and get engaged in other programs. Such programs include computer training, which are basic, intermediate, advanced computer skills, life skills, such as how to apply for a job, balancing checkbooks, creating a spending budget. The daily life issues to include health insurance, homeownership assistance, childcare, car insurance assistance, goal setting and mentoring, working with residents to define educational goals, working with them to define the professional goals, job training which includes resume writing, literacy training, and health – supported services, such as

healthcare, and referral to mental health providers to name a few of the programs that across the country, our Neighborhood Network centers are implementing to make life better for the residents.

And the Neighborhood Networks centers, you know that work as a VITA site, you know promote in this context, they promote the earned income tax credit (EITC), which then becomes a successful anti-poverty tool and a strong work support, by providing fine leadership in many locations, the NNC's, the Neighborhood Networks centers, can lend credibility to the earned income tax credit efforts, and direct resources to support these efforts. Such as, what we do then is we provide the stage to provide the electricity that center's do. And what the VITA contingency does is it has a great group of experts from many different walks of life. And they have now a place, and their population, their target population is low-income residents. So, with a well thought-out plan like. In say. October, November, and everything is coordinated prior to then. These centers, they become a hub of activity in January and the first part of February, which is usually when all of the EITC tax filings are done.

As I said, a lot of the stakeholders come to the table, because they have interest in this sort of activity, the businesses, you know, businesses want to show how – they want to show they're good stewards in the community, and they create some real sound partnerships that are important to us at HUD and provide sound leadership in many locations. When using the NNC consortium, another real interesting thing that we have used here in Richmond, or in the state of Virginia, the Neighborhood Networks has a powerful consortium building development tool. And we've had that done here there's been a lot of excitement generated behind that. And what it has done, it has given hope to the VITA contingency, the earned income tax contingency in the state, that a lot of the money that's being left on the table won't be the case any more.

Now why do I keep saying money on the table? Money on the table, when you have 100 people in your community and you're able to provide free tax assistance to them, generally that's

\$20,000 worth of savings, and then – which can turn into \$200,000 worth of return. That kind of initiative, when put into a grant, then, makes it pretty compelling to say that all of that energy with the leadership, we got the right setup, then grant funding, which grant funding or any kind of additional type of patient capital funding, becomes quite available then.

The centers also ensure that low-income taxpaying residents have access to free tax preparation services, and also, as we said earlier, about the – we have information on financial literacy and asset development, which is generally linked to mainstream institutions. Those are some of the partners, that I'm saying really come out of the woodworks, looking for centers and looking for solid programs. Wachovia offers, periodically, free computers. Just recently, you know, they offered five free computers, state of the art. And they linked them up with a Neighborhood Networks right down the street. And, you know, they're working on making that transfer right now. There're not many people who would turn that away. All that Wachovia then wants is what? They want a program. They want a program that can be reported on a monthly basis. But in our case, we have a tracking tool, the START tracking to which you're populating that on a weekly basis, because of all of the activity. When tax season happens, then you have activity almost daily. So that becomes very important and it's a very valuable tool. And therefore, it lends credibility to the Neighborhood Networks centers.

These are results that become newsworthy, and as I said earlier, they become grantworthy, while also increasing the competitive edge of the property, which is important to us here at HUD. We look at such things as the vacancy, your tenant selection plan, so when this activity happens, you creative edge is understood, the tenancy is stabilized, and therefore, it increases cohesiveness and pride amongst residents. And also another byproduct of it is that many cases, the crime decreases, all of these things can be measured. They're also reported in your START tool. So with the improved community health and wealth, you know, that's consistent with the Neighborhood Networks center's purpose of providing hope and providing focus, as I mentioned earlier, to the residents about the future, and being a factor in cutting crime and vandalism. So, in

short, when you have a Neighborhood Networks center that's vibrant, headed by strong creative leadership, it plays an important role in furthering HUD's mission, as I mentioned to you earlier.

But, I want to leave you with we've got so many Neighborhood Network centers across the country, that no one mission is the same. So, some of the important missions that some of the centers are operating behind us include connecting seniors to the online community, involving youth and seniors together. That's pretty interesting. Seniors, you know, have a reason to live, and kids got a wealth of wisdom for which to tap into. Another mission is to benefit taxpayers by encouraging self-sufficiency. Because of the 1996, Personal Welfare Responsibility Act, there's been a big push in low-income residents, getting and maintaining jobs, so that's something that's been enacted by legislation. Supporting existing service providers improve academic achievement, businesses like that, when that's, you know, a mission. Training. And reducing – one of the newest things that people are picking up on, and it's important too, I know, is reducing the utility – energy efficiency, the environment of the home itself. You know, the reduction of the mold, all of the things that a house can do to cause health problems or missions that some Neighborhood Networks centers are raising, which again lend value and meaning to the centers.

So, I'm excited about the program, and if anybody has any questions about what we do here at HUD and the monitoring aspect, looking at financial, the physical aspects of a property, and the management aspect of how a Neighborhood Networks center might be able to help, give me a call. I'm at 804-771-2100, extension 3737. My e-mail address, like Carol, I will is [Jerryl E. Bennett@HUD.gov](mailto:Jerryl.E.Bennett@HUD.gov).

Michele Higgs: Jerryl, thank you. You're very busy down there in Virginia, and clearly a one-man band for Neighborhood Networks.

Jerryl Bennett: Well I've got – I want to say now that we've been innovative around here, and we've got three, now that are helping. You've got one – you got somebody who has all of the funding

aspects. You also have contract administrators, you know, that's a growing trend, here in the government. So Rashida Mitchell handles the [Performance Based Contract Administrator] PBCA contract, and she's representing Neighborhood Networks in that realm, and you'll get to see them when you come down here because we've got a lot of training scheduled. And then, of course, Casey Lefevre is now watching all of the dollars on the properties. So it's a wonderful thing.

We just had a briefing to a Virginia association of nonprofit housing providers, and they were really thrilled and tickled at the power that they have access to here in the state of Virginia, which then has really stoked a lot of interest in our Neighborhood Networks consortium development. And that's been going like gangbusters. We have technical assistance coming up on the 30th and the 31st. The phone has been ringing off the hook, since I released that message just last week. So we're quite excited down here. And we want to do whatever we can to help such a wonderful initiative.

Michele Higgs: It sounds like you've got good reason to be excited, thanks so much for your input.

Thanks again. I'm going to move on and let Sonya Manners with Dartmouth Square in Inkster, Mi, talk about her involvement.

Sonya Manners: Hello everyone. How is everyone doing? I'm Sonya from Michigan. I actually am from Detroit, the home of the Super Bowl and the Detroit Pistons.

OK. Now that I got my shameless plug in about my city, I think I'm here to talk about the VITA site and the success of our center here in Michigan. I can tell you how we got started, and how it has benefited the residents and also the volunteers. And what I feel that they got out of it. We actually got started by just calling our local IRS office. We got connected with the (Spec Department) and from that, we started up the application for the VITA site. Actually, the application went a little bit easier than I thought it would have ever went, because we had a gentlemen that did the training right here in Inkster. And it was an IRS employee, so we didn't have to do the application, but if

you did, you would get assigned a site number and an e-fin (EFIN) number, and that's your e-file number. And you also get software to load on to your computer, which we have a really nice state-of-the-art computer center here.

From that, you have two ways of training; you have to submit for volunteers. And volunteers will come to you, but then, some of them won't. They may have background in accounting. There may be teachers that are retired. They could be persons that are out of work right now. Our volunteers come from every walk of life. And from those volunteers, we either did one, have the trainer come in from the IRS and train them how to do the basic, intermediate and advanced tax returns. They also teach you how to do military returns if you're near a military base. And if you're a returning student, that's a site that you go into on the IRS for returning students. But you actually are certified, your volunteers get certified on learning how to file income taxes. I mean they learn things from filing status, to earned income tax credits to child credits to education credits to miscellaneous credits. So they're really learning how to file income taxes.

Sort of like you would go to one of those H&R Blocks, and learn how to do it, but here it's all free. They sit down, and the instructor takes them through a learning process, and then they have to take a test at the end for their certification. Or say, if an individual could not make it to the training, with the trainer, the actual person, they can go right into the IRS government Web site under www.irs.gov, do a search through "link and learn," and they can actually take the course online, and be certified right there online. I thought that was just the coolest thing. I know, I get so excited by the little things.

One thing that Carol mentioned, or maybe it might have been Jerry, was talking about equipment. There are companies out here that will actually grant you computers and things of that sort, if this is something that your center don't have, and it's something that you want to do, you get the filing. You might connect with another company that wants to give you computers,

you've got volunteers in the local church, there's your program. It's very simple and easy to set up. And it's little or no effort, except for organization.

I thought the main benefit of it was that – or maybe was that you had to do at least 35 returns, and I'm pretty sure, I manage a property of 138 units, well over 200 and some-odd resident households – in the household. So, I know I could get 35 returns done within tax season. And anything above the 35 is just brownie points for you.

I thought one of the benefits was for the volunteers, they learned how to do taxes, and the individual gets their return free, within 10 days by doing e-filing. So, it wasn't like they were waiting or they had to pay \$250 to get a return. I think that is just highway rip off, when they have, you know, services like this out there. And then, a spin off, which Carol was talking about, was educating the individuals. Once they do get their return, something that our site is doing is through the – is FDIC.gov and it's called Money Smarts. It's basic banking information. They have the trainer instructions right online. It teaches you how to take individuals through banking, to investment, to buying a home. And it's simple programs that you can have one of your volunteers, or even one of your employees that's hired by the center to facilitate. And it's a program that will benefit all. Just because you're an apartment manager doesn't mean you can't teach someone how to buy a home. And with that, I'll do my closing. Thank you.

Michele Higgs: Sonya, that was terrific, except for the commercial for the football team. This has been very helpful. Tulare, do we have anyone on the queue; we need to take questions now. Do you have anyone on the line?

Operator: Thank you. The question-and-answer session will be conducted electronically. If you would like to ask a question, please do so by pressing the star key followed by the digit one on your Touch-Tone telephone. If you are using a speakerphone, please make sure your mute function is turned

off to allow your signal to reach our equipment. We'll proceed in the order that you signal us.

Once again, it is star one if you do have a question or a comment. And we'll pause for a moment.

We do have a question from Carmen Hill with Housing with Heart.

Carmen Hill: This is so exciting. Hi, can you hear me?

Michele Higgs: Hi, Carmen. Yes, ma'am.

Carmen Hill: OK. My question, you had mentioned that there was a car ownership program. I'm calling from California, cars are the primary interest of our residents, what's the car ownership program that Jerryl mentioned?

Jerryl Bennett: I mentioned a car ownership program that was provided in a IRS tax brochure, and they even give you an example of – let me get back to that right here. Here it is.

Carmen Hill: Did you say IRS?

Jerryl Bennett: Yes, ma'am. The IRS book is called Opportunities for Linking Workers to Free Tax Help and Asset Development. It's dated 2006. And the car ownership program on page 18 of that brochure talks about Ways to Work, Inc., a community development financial institution and affiliates of the alliance for children and families. Ways to Work provide small loans that are used to purchase a car, and so on and so forth.

Carol Quiller: Jerryl, let me interject there. Is there an IRS publication?

Jerryl Bennett: Yes, it is.

Carol Quiller: And does it have a publication number down at the bottom?

JerryI Bennett: It's – sure – I think it's Center on Budget Policy...

Carol Quiller: OK, that's not IRS. That's Center on Budget and Policy, but if you go to their Web site, you should be able to obtain a copy of that. It's www.cpbb.org. And that right – that's the right Web address, I think, off the top of my head. So, Carmen, that may be a way you can get some more information about that.

Carmen Hill: Wait I'm confused. It's opportunities for pre-tax help and asset development, but who's actually publishing it?

Carol Quiller: Centers on Budget and Policy.

Michele Higgs: Carol, could you repeat that e-mail address – I mean the Web site.

Carol Quiller: I think it's www.cpbb.org.

Michele Higgs: OK, Carmen does that help?

Carmen Hill: Try that again.

Carol Quiller: C as in cat. P as in Paul. B as in Boy. B.

Carmen Hill: Two B's.

Carol Quiller: Yes, ma'am.

Carmen Hill: Dot-org.

Carol Quiller: They have a wealth of information that's out on their Web site.

Carmen Hill: I don't think that's it, I clicked on it.

Carol Quiller: It's not it. I think it's – it's Centers on Budget and Policy. Let me get it up. I'm sorry, I
thinking off the top here. Go ahead with another question and I'll come back to that.

Michele Higgs: OK. We might be able to get that to you at a later point, Carmen, we've got the question,
and we will communicate with you once we get that detail, OK.

Jerryl Bennett: Yes, I see it right down here. It's Charlie Bravo Papa Papa.

Carol Quiller: I got it backwards, yes.

Michele Higgs: It's CBPP.

Carol Quiller: Yes.

Jerryl Bennett: The Center@Center.cbpp.org.

Carol Quiller: Right.

Michele Higgs: Got that Carmen?

Carmen Hill: Go back with the papa stuff. It's C, B as in boy.

Michele Higgs: P as in Paul, P as in Paul, dot-org.

Carmen Hill: OK. Thank you.

Michele Higgs: That's center@center.cbpb.org.

Jerryl Bennett: At center.cbpb.org.

Carmen Hill: We're going to get this thing. CB Papa Papa.

Michele Higgs: That's it. That was good. That helped. Dot-org. Does that take care of it?

Carmen Hill: Yes, thank you.

Michele Higgs: OK. To Tulare, do we have any other calls on the line?

Operator: And just as a reminder, it is star one if you do have a question or a comment. We do have a question from Emeri Ndukwe with Famicos Foundation.

Michele Higgs: OK, hello there. How are you?

Emeri Ndukwe: OK, how are you?

Michele Higgs: So good.

Emeri Ndukwe: How's everyone?

Carol Quiller: Blessed.

Michele Higgs: Great. Do you have a question?

Emeri Ndukwe: I have the last Web site that he mentioned about the money management, I didn't get it right. I think I have FDIC.gov.

Carol Quiller: Yes, sir that is correct.

Emeri Ndukwe: That is correct.

Carol Quiller: F as in Frank, D as in Dog, I as in Indian, C as in cat, dot-gov, G O V.

Emeri Ndukwe: OK.

Carol Quiller: And it's called "money smart."

Michele Higgs: When you get into the site, you get "money smart". And also, be aware, folks, that when this conference call is translated into a transcript, all of these Web sites will be available for you.

Emeri Ndukwe: OK.

Michele Higgs: OK. I know it's going to take a minute, but they'll be available.

Emeri Ndukwe: Thank you very much.

Michele Higgs: OK. Thanks for calling.

Operator: And we have no questions in our queue at this point. But just as a final reminder, it is star one if you do have a question or a comment. We do have a question from Angel Perez with ...

Michele Higgs: OK. Great, hi, Angel.

Angel Perez: Hey, how are you doing guys? From Philadelphia, PA, I've got a question, I've been doing "money smart" like for a while, and I was wondering, do they ever do the "money smart" in Spanish, for those who happen to speak Spanish?

Carol Quiller: Yes, they do. If you go into that Web site, you can actually order the CD's in Spanish. I actually have them in Spanish, also.

Angel Perez: OK. Great. I need the Web site one more time, sorry for that.

Michele Higgs: FDIC.gov. F as in Frank, D as in dog, I as in Iggy, C as in cat, dot-gov, and then you look for "money smarts."

Angel Perez: OK. You're going to provide us with the information about the links, right.

Michele Higgs: Absolutely.

Angel Perez: That's great. Because I'm Hispanic, Hispanic take really slow spelling words.

Michele Higgs: OK.

Angel Perez: OK, thank you guys.

Michele Higgs: You're welcome, thanks for calling.

Operator: And we do have a follow-up from Carmen Hill.

Michele Higgs: Carmen?

Carmen Hill: Yes, I have one other question, has any of the Neighborhood Networks centers ever used the VITA program to train residents on how to do tax returns?

Sonya Manners: Yes, ma'am I have.

Carmen Hill: And how has that worked out?

Sonya Manners: It worked out very well. That's how we did our tax returns. We had five volunteers. They come in. They do the training. They got certified. And when the participants come in to get their taxes done, it's the volunteers that actually do the taxes.

Carmen Hill: But, I mean volunteers from the community.

Sonya Manners: Yes, ma'am.

Carmen Hill: Wow, OK. So that's kind of like a job program developing skills and self-confidence?

Sonya Manners: Yes, ma'am. And, as I say, that some of our volunteers are unemployed. Some of them are retired teachers, retirees, in-between jobs. And, I sold it as "learn a new skill." You know, "if you don't know how to do your own taxes, learn how to do your own, and you can assist someone to do theirs."

Carmen Hill: Good, great idea.

Sonya Manners: Yes, it was. And it worked out. And I hope next year it works out even better. Because this year...

Carmen Hill: But normally, you have to apply, like, in the fall – I think I remember hearing something you have to apply like in October.

Carol Quiller: Yes, there's a process – this is Carol again, with IRS. It's like a timeline we follow. The earlier that you get involved with your local territories, the quicker and the more easier they can transition you into fitting you into the organization, because there's already existing sites there. So they kind of do some back, you know, research, and check things to make sure that you're in a neighborhood where we need to be, and where your clients need you most. And see if we can get you some services, and connect you with others in your neighborhood as well.

Yes, it starts around the latter part of the summer, on through the fall, and usually by October, November don't you think, Sonya that everything is in place, because training starts after that. Yes.

Sonya Manners: By November, everything is in place, so in December, I mean you really – you can train your trainers through the summer. They can train any time because if they go into the IRS Web site, they go to "link and learn," and they can take the course on their own at their own pace.

Michele Higgs: So this makes it very easy for them.

Sonya Manners: Yes, very easy. And after they're done, they feel really confident that I learned something new. And I can help somebody. I can help my family, you know, my little sister doesn't have to go and pay H&R Block \$250 to get her tax return, because she only makes 10,000. It's wonderful, the feeling that individuals come back to you and say, you know, they feel very

confident that they've done something, and achieved something totally different than what they were used to doing.

Carmen Hill: Great, thank you.

Michele Higgs: So, you're really empowering them.

Sonya Manners: Correct.

Michele Higgs: Really empowering them, that's terrific. Tulare, have we any other questions?

Operator: We do have a question from Charles Anderson with Interstate Realty.

Michele Higgs: Hello.

Charles Anderson: And how are you today?

Michele Higgs: Real good, thanks. How about you?

Charles Anderson: Very well. I have a question for Jerryl, if he doesn't mind. I missed part of his telephone number. I got the 804...

Jerryl Bennett: Seven seven one.

Charles Anderson: Seven seven one, yes.

Jerryl Bennett: Two one hundred.

Charles Anderson: Two one hundred, OK, got it.

Jerryl Bennett: Extension 3737.

Charles Anderson: OK. Extension 3737. OK. Thank you.

Jerryl Bennett: All right.

Charles Anderson: OK.

Michele Higgs: And remember, folks, this will be published in the transcript in about two weeks. Anyone else, Tulare?

Operator: Yes, we have Jeanine Schmidt with Durango Housing Center.

Michele Higgs: OK, great. Hi, Jeanine.

Jeanine Schmidt: Hi. I missed – I have two questions. One I think might have missed something, is this also for training residents, maybe to do other people's taxes for job related skills?

Michele Higgs: My sense is that they're getting the skills to do it, you know, if they're going to do it on their own property, then they should be able to take it out elsewhere. Am I wrong with that Sonya?

Sonya Manners: No, ma'am, you're not. I have actually had some volunteers that said, well, I think I can go and work here, and, you know, work at, like, some of the tax return places, because they do take a test. And they're qualified, once they do the "link and learn," it does certify them, they are certified.

Michele Higgs: And they're getting the experience by working, you know, on property, so they're getting a double bang on their buck.

Sonya Manners: They learn how to do the e-filing. They actually input the information on the computer in the software that the IRS provides you. And they actually do the e-filing.

Michele Higgs: Jeanine, does that help?

Jeanine Schmidt: Yes. I have another question, too. As far as breaking down barriers, because – our residents, I think, because we did have a tax class here last year, and our center used to be for the community in which community members took the class, but residents did not. And now we're serving just residents, and so – but they're not taking the class. And I think a barrier might be that they think, you know, they all ready pay their rent here, they think that the housing is going to get involved in their business or something like that. Do you have something as far as breaking down that barrier?

Michele Higgs: Well Sonya, you had said that you had publicized it as a way to gain another skill, correct?

Sonya Manners: Yes, ma'am. We did.

Jeanine Schmidt: Yes, but holding it here on site, they just think of it that way. I'm not sure...

Sonya Manners: Well, I have to say there's – you know, we already know their business, this is low-income housing.

Jeanine Schmidt: Yes.

Sonya Manners: Unless, they're going to report something that they didn't report to us, but that's not for us to scrutinize. You know, if they come in and do a recertification and they don't report something, the proof will be in the pudding, it will show.

Jeanine Schmidt: Yes.

Sonya Manners: But it's not at though you're – you know, the housing management is going to be looking at every little return. You can't do that because you've got volunteers that are doing it, and it's all private. You have to acknowledge the privacy of the individual that's coming in.

Jeanine Schmidt: So, I missed something. Do you help the network centers with purchasing of this software to do that?

Sonya Manners: You don't purchase anything. They give it to you all for free.

Jeanine Schmidt: OK.

Sonya Manners: And you will go to your local IRS office, and/or call and the department that you want to talk to is (Spec), is that right, Carol?

Carol Quiller: Yes, she can call me. I've given her my number and we can start here, and we will get you in touch, because there are some states that have more than one territory responsibility there. So we'd have to determine where she was. And if there was an interest, we'll get you started, get you in the right direction.

Jeanine Schmidt: OK. And your number will be on the notes.

Carol Quiller: Yes.

Michele Higgs: We have notes for you, and her number will be there.

Carol Quiller: Yes, ma'am.

Jeanine Schmidt: All right. Thank you.

Michele Higgs: Thanks, Carol. Thanks, Jeanine. Thanks, Sonya.

Operator: Next, we have Heather Wiedenfeld with Northwest Real Estate.

Heather Wiedenfeld: OK. Hi, this is Heather. I'm in Boise, ID, and we are a management company. And in our Boise [company] we have about four properties, but they're very small. Some of them, you know, our largest one being 40 units, and so I heard that there was a requirement, that there has to be at least 35 returns done in a center in order to be able to, I guess, maybe get the benefits of it. Is it restricted, is there any restrictions to just residents being able to do that. Or can maybe we combine a couple of properties into one program? Do you have any suggestions on how to kind of get around our small properties?

Carol Quiller: We encourage, and this is Carol again, with IRS. And we encourage a combination of sites. The more, I think, the better run it is because you get more help. The smaller the site, you tend not to get as much assistance that you need. But yes, we do encourage a combination of sites, and getting the transmissions in the site, and the tax returns done there. You can pick one site to actually hold the actual VITA site, but then have the residents from the other areas come visit or be bussed in or however, you know, you have to be creative in the way you want the site to run, but yes, we do encourage that.

Heather Wiedenfeld: So, there's no way that we would be able to, like, maybe load the software on one computer at one sight, and the other computer. It all has to be in one property?

Carol Quiller: Now, Sonya, you tell me how it's run as far as the locals – if you have more than one computer, you can't transmit but from one computer. Transmit – transmitting means electronic filing. You can transmit from one computer. But you could have a set of computers somewhere where you actually input the information from tax files on their, but they're only going to give you one set of software.

Sonya Manners: Right. What we did was, we actually have a server here, but we have eight desktops and seven of them are used for the taxpayers, the volunteers. They can input it, but it only transmits from one computer, so we put them all into one e-file and transmit them all. But we could have five different people working on five, you know, different people's returns.

And actually, it's better if you open it up to the community. Don't just open it up to your residents only. The surrounding community around our apartment community is just as low-income as us. So, everything that we do here at Dartmouth, we open it up to the entire community. We advertise it at the local schools, at the PTO meetings. We send out literature to the local churches. We take it to the [Family Independence Agency] FIA office, the local library, the post office, the city council building. We go to the local city council meeting, because it is televised over the cable, we announce what we're doing there, so we know that a larger section of the community would hear it. And those are some of the things we do. We do advertisement in the local newspaper. Some people read about it. And I think we've done now in Inkster in this year, maybe 110 returns so far.

Heather Wiedenfeld: Wow.

Sonya Manners: Yes, between 60 and 110, I think Mr. Cedric told me.

Heather Wiedenfeld: OK. So, what happens if you don't get – I'm just concerned that I would like start this and then nobody would show up. What if I don't get 35 returns? Would I just not be able to participate next year? Or would I have to pay for the software?

Carol Quiller: Well it depends on if you're a first-year site, and we tend to give some leeway to first-year sites, because of the start-up troubles that you'll come across. There will be some variances, and some stumbling stones, and things in your way that will prevent you from producing. But that depends upon the territory. They have local procedures in place that you – they will inform you of if you become interested, if you have them become interested. In the initial conversation that you'll have between them, they'll put out the guidelines and tell you what's expected.

And, not only that, Sonya was correct, marketing is the key. You have to get out there, and as we like to say it here, we shake the trees, and somebody rakes the leaves. It's basically, you try to make a fall out. You make everybody know that they're there, not saying you want to take them away from what they're used to because it is a trust issue as well. But, you educate them first. You market them next. And, whatever you get out of those two initiatives is what the results will be. So, that depends on what you've done before, during, and after in order to get the results you need.

Heather Wiedenfeld: Right. So is there an income limit of the taxes that we can – that we would be doing, like you can't make more than "X" amount of dollars to qualify to use this center? Or is it pretty much open to everybody?

Carol Quiller: We do ask that it keeps it to low-income level usually which is the ceiling for EITC, which was 37,000 some odd – no more than \$38,000. It may go up next year with the EITC level going up, but usually below that particular income. And, basically, the thing is, you don't want the complex – a complex tax situation for your volunteers.

Heather Wiedenfeld: Right.

Carol Quiller: Usually if their income level is below that amount, they don't have but straight W-2 income.

There may be a little interest income from a bank or something, but mostly it's just straight income, so it requires very little input 1040, 1048, 1040Z.

Heather Wiedenfeld: Great. OK.

Sonya Manners: When you do the "link and learn," it's basic. It's real basic. It doesn't get into – the tax laws are basic, you know, for lower income. It doesn't get into the businesses. It does do military though, which is good.

Heather Wiedenfeld: Yes, OK. Thank you so much.

Carol Quiller: Thanks for your interest.

Michele Higgs: Thanks so much. Thanks for calling in. Tulare, I'm going to ask if we have any other questions.

Operator: Yes, we do have one from Lawanda Gardner with New Horizon Learning.

Michele Higgs: Hi, Lawanda.

Lawanda Gardner: Hi, how are you doing?

Michele Higgs: OK, thanks.

Lawanda Gardner: OK. I have a cold, so I hope you can understand me.

Michele Higgs: Go ahead.

Lawanda Gardner: She pretty much asked the question I wanted.

Michele Higgs: OK.

Lawanda Gardner: My question was, I tried to implement this fundraiser, this tax program this year to get people to come out to the center to – so we can help them with their taxes. And on the reverse end, the center would have made a profit for the fundraiser. My thing was I couldn't get the people to come out. I sent out flyers. I walked the neighborhood. You know, so my question is what was I doing wrong?

Carol Quiller: Let me ask you something, Lawanda. You were charging for the tax services?

Lawanda Gardner: No.

Carol Quiller: So, it was a fundraiser, you said it was a fundraiser.

Lawanda Gardner: Right. The person that I was having – it was an outside company that was coming in and actually doing the taxes. And for each person's taxes that they did, the learning center itself would have profit \$25 off each person for a fundraiser.

Carol Quiller: That's not considered VITA because our services are totally free. And in any sense, if you charge for anything that's been done, based on the tax returns, it's no longer considered a volunteer program.

Lawanda Gardner: OK.

Carol Quiller: Therefore, the volunteers – we encourage free tax prep and most people in the community that these Neighborhood Networks centers reside, need those services. So again, versus \$25, \$250, of course, \$25 is cheaper than \$250, but still it's not considered a VITA center if it's not free. And as far as the marketing for it, I don't know what the glitch was in your system. But again, you know, if you do it through our program and it's free, we provide everything that's free. We provide the advertisement, you know, the flyers. We ask that you try to come up with some as well. But I mean there's a lot of different things out there for you to use, that maybe didn't work in the effort that you did that this season.

But again, those, if you're interested, and not going to charge, give me a call.

Sonya Manners: Yes, I think the downfall there was that the charge was there. This might not be the avenue to do a fundraiser.

Carol Quiller: Right.

Sonya Manners: The fundraiser has to be in a different setting, because when it comes down to income taxes, nobody wants to – you know, they'll go to pay, you know, some company to prepare for them. But if they know that they can go to that company that's more reliable, more well known they'll probably do that, until you get your center established in doing it, you know, then they'll come.

Lawanda Gardner: OK. But you all are going to send out all of that information.

Michele Higgs: Ladies, we're going to send you out a transcript at the end of the call. It will be a couple of weeks, and all of the details will be there. This entire call for you to go over.

Lawanda Gardner: OK. I appreciate it.

Michele Higgs: OK. Thanks for calling in. Thank you very much. Folks, it looks like we've come to the end of this conference call. Yet, another monthly call. And, Sonya and Jerryl and Carol, I really want to thank you for your contribution today. Clearly, a lot of people got some good information. I also want to thank my colleague, Abraham Odom who coordinated this call.

If there are no more questions, I just want to remind you of the other resources that are available to you through the Neighborhood Networks Initiative. There's the Neighborhood Networks information line at 888-312-2743. And then there's a Neighborhood Networks Web site, www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org. On that Web site, you'll find success stories that may help you with an idea or validate a plan that you've been considering. And don't forget, the (RTAWS) are coming, that's the Regional Technical Assistance Workshops on the West Coast in San Diego, April 5-7 of this year. And, on the east, in Boston, June 21 through 23. And, know that there's scholarships available for the San Diego session. However, today is the last day for applying for those scholarships. You can speak with Mr. Kurd Ali at 301-519-6014 for further information.

I also want to remind you of our upcoming conference call, which will be Tuesday, April 18, at 3:00 p.m. on the topic of "Street Smarts: Laying Out a Path for Community Outreach." Thank you for joining us this afternoon. Take good care. Talk to you next time.

Operator: And that does conclude our conference call. We do thank you for your participation.

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